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SUBJECT: EU FOREIGN MINISTERS CALL FOR CONTINUED IRAN CONSENSUS

¶1. Summary: EU leaders used the the informal "Gymnich" meeting of EU foreign ministers on March 10-11 to call for continued international consensus as Iran and its nuclear program is referred to the UN Security Council -- as well as to express hope that a diplomatic solution was still possible. Septels report on discussions on Hamas, Ukraine and Belarus. End Summary.

International Consensus

¶2. Austrian Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik, representing Austria's EU Council Presidency, spoke of the need to clarify the nature of Iran's nuclear program, pointing to the numerous discrepancies highlighted in IAEA reports. She emphasized that Iran's right to the peaceful use of civilian nuclear energy is not in question. She also reported that improving the EU's contacts with civil society in Iran was a core issue for the EU, as it was important not to isolate the Iranian population. CFSP High Representative Javier Solana and Plassnik both noted that the "door remains open" for Iran and a diplomatic solution.

¶4. External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner stressed the need for a compromise solution and urged Iran to take the deal offered by Russians. She maintained her hope in a diplomatic solution but lamented Iran's intransigence, which has lost it a good deal of international confidence. While calling for the international community to remain united, Ferrero-Waldner warned against isolating Iran: "We do not want to isolate Iran and Iran should not isolate itself."

She criticized Iranian President Ahmadinejad's recent remarks as "saber-rattling" not conducive to productive negotiations.

¶5. In separate remarks, French Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy stressed that Iran must return to complete suspension of enrichment and related activities as well as cooperate fully with the IAEA. The EU should remain at the forefront of this issue and stay firm against proliferation, he added. The Europeans are united on this issue, according to Douste-Blazy, and are in permanent contact with the U.S., China, Russia, and the non-aligned and Islamic worlds.

Progressive Approach in UN Security Council

¶6. Douste-Blazy said that the UN Security Council would take a "progressive" approach to the issue and not start with punitive actions. Solana also advocated a gradual approach in the UN Security Council, with the first step being a statement by the Security Council president.

McCaw